

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 03, 2020

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Seema Verma
Administrator
Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
7500 Security Blvd.
Baltimore, MD 21244

Dear Secretary Azar and Administrator Verma:

We write to you today with grave concerns regarding your administration's recent decision not to reopen the state-level health insurance exchanges run by the federal government. Yesterday, the Labor Department reported that unemployment claims soared to a record 6.6 million due to the COVID-19 public health crisis and ensuing economic fallout. With growing fears that people will be uninsured during the coronavirus outbreak, we urge you to allow individuals who are at-risk for COVID-19 to access affordable health care options through the health insurance marketplaces with a special enrollment period.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2017 the number of people without health insurance increased to 28.0 million, up from 27.3 million the year before. Of that number, about 1 in 3 uninsured workers were in service occupations. Despite individuals qualifying for a special enrollment period for losing job-based coverage, 1 in 3 Americans will remain uninsured.¹ Given the crisis at hand, CMS should authorize an emergency special enrollment period to ensure that all Americans have access to affordable health insurance that will cover needed health care services for testing and treatment, especially now.

The federal government has opened special enrollment periods in the past during previous declared major disasters or emergencies, claiming exceptional circumstances.² On January 31, 2020, Secretary Azar declared a nationwide public health emergency under Section 319 of the Public Health Service Act. As of Friday afternoon, more than 258,000 people in the United

¹ United States Census Bureau. September 12, 2018. *Most Uninsured Were Working-Age Adults*. Retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2018/09/who-are-the-uninsured.html>

² U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Service. April 2, 2020. *Special Enrollment Periods for complex issues*. Retrieved from: <https://www.healthcare.gov/sep-list/>


States have been infected, and at least 6,593 have died—the COVID-19 pandemic should be considered an exceptional circumstance.³

Medical costs are already a common concern in the U.S., particularly for people without insurance. The Kaiser foundation projects that the cost of inpatient admissions for COVID-19 treatment could top \$20,000⁴. This is an unprecedented financial constraint that could prevent millions of people from seeing doctors to get tested or treated. We urge HHS and CMS to establish a special enrollment period for the coronavirus and rightfully extend the opportunity for millions of uninsured Americans to newly seek out coverage.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue and we look forward to your response.



Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

/s/ Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

/s/ Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress

/s/ Tim Ryan
Member of Congress

/s/ Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

/s/ Juan Vargas
Member of Congress

/s/ John B. Larson
Member of Congress

/s/ Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

/s/ Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

/s/ Jim Cooper
Member of Congress

/s/ Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress

/s/ Terri A. Sewell
Member of Congress

/s/ Yvette D. Clarke
Member of Congress

/s/ Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress

/s/ Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

³ Hernandez, Sergio; O'Key, Sean; Watts, Amanda; Manley, Byron; Pettersson, Henrik. April 2, 2020. *Tracking Covid-19 cases in the United States*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2020/health/coronavirus-us-maps-and-cases/>

⁴ Rae, Matthew; Claxton, Gary; Kurani, Nisha; McDermott, Daniel; Cox, Cynthia. The Peterson Center on Healthcare and KFF (Kaiser Family Foundation). March 13, 2020. *Potential costs of coronavirus treatment for people with employer coverage*. Retrieved from: <https://www.healthsystemtracker.org/brief/potential-costs-of-coronavirus-treatment-for-people-with-employer-coverage/>

/s/ Jerrold Nadler Member of Congress	/s/ Dina Titus Member of Congress
/s/ Chris Pappas Member of Congress	/s/ Brenda L. Lawrence Member of Congress
/s/ Eddie Bernice Johnson Member of Congress	/s/ Marcia L. Fudge Member of Congress
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